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SUBJECT: VIEWS FROM IZMIR ON IRAQ, EU MEMBERSHIP, HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: ANKARA 6206

1. (SBU) Summary: Izmir business and religious leaders, NGOs and a journalist shared their views on human rights, Iraq, Turkey's EU membership and religious issues November 12 with Izmir liaison officer. The Izmir branches of the Human Rights Foundation and the Bar Association, both involved with legal access and medical aspects of torture, noted their displeasure with U.S. policy in Iraq. The muftu's office stressed increasing religiosity in Izmir, including applicants for the hajj and in Koranic classes. EGIAD, the Young Businessmen's Association, was focussed on EU membership and eager to establish contacts with U.S. businessmen associations and participate in U.S. trade missions and fairs. Former MP and Hurriyet Aegean rep Tartan was confident of the role model Izmir could serve as an EU city. End summary.

2. (SBU) Izmir Deputy Muftu Cemil Karaguz discussed the responsibilities of the muftu's office, including overseeing 200 mosques in the Izmir region, and administration of Koranic courses, both short and long term, which attract many youth as well as women. He claimed that religiosity in Izmir has increased in recent years, and that the number of applicants for the hajj in Izmir doubled from 3,000 to 6,000 for 2005 -- with half of the applicants women. In the final days before Ramazan Bayram, the muftu's office was busy answering inquiries from residents regarding the amount of zekah (tithe in income to the poor, one of the requirements of Islam) to be distributed. The assistant to the muftu noted that the imams deal with current concerns such as the growth of pickpocketing by reinforcing moral values in their weekly khutbas (sermons). (Comment: Although the muftu office's views on the growth of religiosity may be overstated, the influx of residents to the Izmir region from the southeast may be changing the traditionally more secular character of the population. End comment.)

3. (SBU) Lawyers at the Izmir Bar Association, a 4800-member organization that concentrates on human rights and the prevention of torture, discussed their goals to ensure that all detainees are guaranteed access to a lawyer following arrest, and that detainees who claim they were tortured are examined by qualified medical doctors. They were eager to re-establish contact with USG representatives, but underlined their concern about U.S. policy in Iraq.

4. (SBU) Sharing the Bar Association's concern about U.S. Iraq policy and human rights was the Izmir branch of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, an NGO that provides physical and psychological treatment and rehabilitation services to those subject to torture. Dr. Veli Lok heads a group of four reputable medical doctors at the Izmir branch, who offer their services on a volunteer basis and approach the problem clinically. Sharing statistics on examinees in Izmir in 2004, he noted that of the 122 cases to date, 27 were women, 40 were victims of torture, over 99 per cent of the examinees originated from the southeast and 90-95 per cent were of Kurdish origin. At the conclusion of the meeting, Dr. Lok criticized U.S. policy in Iraq, commenting that U.S. concern about victims of torture in Turkey is matched by Turkish concern about Iraqi victims of torture by U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Liaison officer stressed to both Associations the U.S. commitment to human rights, and noted that these incidents are being dealt with legally.

5. (SBU) Directors of EGIAD, the Aegean Young Businessmen's Association, told liaison officer that their members had overcome initial concerns about EU membership and were now looking forward to the benefits EU accession would bring to commerce in Izmir. EGIAD is an extremely active association and holds monthly meetings with speakers for all members as well as periodic smaller work groups on EU and foreign relations, IT, legal, press, and cultural issues. They were eager to reinvigorate contacts with American young businessmen's associations and to participate in trade missions, trade fairs and matchmaker programs in the U.S.

6. (SBU) Hakan Tartan, former DSP MP and Minister of Labor, who ran as a candidate of Ismail Cem's New Turkey Party in 2002, is now Hurriyet's Aegean representative. Tartan, a native of Izmir, was enthusiastic about Izmir's advantages in the cultural and commercial areas -- and further promoted

this role of Izmir as a model city for Turkey's EU membership in his Hurriyet column November 13.

17. (SBU) Comment: In general, the interlocutors expressed little concern about the nature of the continued U.S. presence in Izmir -- as opposed to the views conveyed to Ambassador Edelman during his October 25 visit to Izmir. (reftel) End comment.
SMITH